



Chuck Underwood, President  
1343 Fleming Street. Cincinnati, OH 45206.  
PH: 513 - 221 - 1973  
EM: [chuck@genimperative.com](mailto:chuck@genimperative.com)  
WEB: <http://www.genimperative.com>

## Generational Marketplace Strategy

### Generation-Specific Tips, Tactics, & Guidelines

All materials herein not directly attributed to other sources are copyrighted materials belonging to The Generational Imperative, Inc. Copyright 2006. All rights reserved.

Do not print, duplicate, distribute, or publish this document without the advance and written consent of The Generational Imperative, Inc.

# Connecting With Millennials

**Born 1982 – present. Current age, in 2006: birth to 24.**

## Remember

For the most part, this generation is still forming its values. All but the very oldest Millennials are still “kids”, when the fickleness of youth will drive many of their consumer choices. So, don’t over-rely on generational values and attitudes when marketing to the younger Millennials. But the older Millennials are now in adulthood and have departed their formative years. So, we do get a reliable read on the core values of these “first-wave” Millennials. And the following information applies to them, not (yet) to the younger Millennials.

This generation is all about technology, all about communications. Cell phones, text messaging, IM’ing, emailing, social networking, blogs, and on and on and on.

Millennials do things in groups. They are a “WE” generation. Xers, conversely, were individualistic: a “ME” generation.

As a marketer, you will never have the undivided attention of this generation. They are constantly multi-tasking. TV is important to them, but it shares the same time and space with other media and activities.

Millennials care much less about brands than X’ers do. They believe they MAKE retail brands by discovering them, so make your brand discoverable.

Millennials are ethnically diverse: about 1/3 are from minorities. Millennials are noticeably tolerant of divorced households and gay lifestyles, but traditional values and parental approval are still important to them.

Millennials feel like a generation. Like Boomers and the G. I. Generation, they have major historic events – September 11, the Iraq War, Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina – and other shared formative-years experiences that are giving their 80-million members a sense of a Shared Center that is uniquely “theirs”.

Millennials are a nurtured generation. And a very heavily-adult-supervised generation. Living in a very structured environment. The concern is they’re growing up “soft” under protective “Helicopter Parents” and so might not become tough enough or independent enough for the challenging adult world that awaits them.

As they enter adulthood and their career years, my corporate clients nationwide consistently describe Millennials’ career expectations as “unrealistic” because they came of age so sheltered and given so much time, attention, money, and materialism by their parents.

Also, like the Boomers when they were this age, Millennials are idealistic, want to make a big difference, and so want “meaningful” assignments on the job. The work assignments customarily attached to “entry-level” positions seems tedious and unimportant to them.

They take multiculturalism for granted. They take globalism for granted.

This generation feels time pressure – they schedule everything – and grade pressure, because of the constant proficiency testing they grew up with and the competition with their fellow Millennials to get into the better colleges.

To repeat, they are a “we” generation, not a “me” generation like X’ers. Technology now constantly connects Millennials to other *people*: cell phones, pagers and beepers, email, chat rooms, instant messaging. Their classrooms were frequently structured for group projects, in which all members would get the same grade based upon the entire group’s performance. “We”.

The terror attacks of 9/11 have molded a long list of core values in all Millennials: a sense of nation; giving; patriotism; an appreciation of heroism; team play and togetherness; selflessness; a sense that there’s more to this world than just “me”; an interest in spirituality.

This generation has a strong sense of community service and social activism, in part because schools began to emphasize it during their formative years and partly because community service in high school looks good on a college application.

Like Boomers, they’re a massive generation and thus will go through their school and work years amid fierce competition from their fellow Millennials for the best grades, the best colleges, the best entry-level jobs, and the best promotions and career paths. X’ers, so few in number, will never face the same ferocious competition from their own members.

And Millennials are hearing that same “you’re a special generation” message that Boomers heard. So Millennials are growing up with great expectations for their own generation.

This generation possesses spending – and saving! - power unprecedented among youth in American history.

### **TIPS, TACTICS, GUIDELINES – MILLENNIALS**

Their younger members are still kids, so they’re still wacky and fickle and unpredictable, so Deal With It. As one expert writes, “today’s hot fad is tomorrow’s hot air”.

“Hip” is essential. So go where kids go: the mall, the concert, the skateboard park; all of which could change by tomorrow.

Peer-to-peer recommendations and approval are enormously important. Win over their friends. Consider assembling a team of teen peers. Use viral marketing. Examples:

- Avon created a program whereby girls 16 to 24 would sell their new girls’ cosmetic line, “mark”.
- Procter & Gamble launched a new grooming/hygiene line for teen boys, “OT/Overtime”. The girls are demanding that the boys look like rock stars. Teen boys are tuning in to hygiene.
- P&G also launched Tremor, which emails info on new products to 200,000 teen “connectors”, or influencers, who will spread the word about the new product to peers.

Millennial college students, unlike GenXers at that age, are big - big - readers of their college’s daily newspapers. So, consider exploiting that enthusiasm. Don’t assume your message must involve moving video. College newspapers, with Millennials now dominating the nation’s campuses, are thriving.

Naturally, multimedia messages are essential.

### **CAUSE MARKETING** - Cone/Roper survey, 2000:

- 91% of today's Millennial teens value companies and products that support good causes.
- 89% would be likely to switch brands to one associated with a good cause.
- Says the report, "Companies that support causes will win teen loyalty and dollars".
- And remember, this survey took place BEFORE 9/11, which only fortified this sentiment.

Among retailers who have used Cause Marketing with Millennials: Target... Nike... Starbucks... American Outfitters... Macy's... Timberland. This list will surely grow.

### **TECHNOLOGY:**

- Internet usage – and the hottest websites for Millennials – are constantly changing and growing. Stay current on this. Teen Research Unlimited, Jupiter Research, Pew Research, and others monitor this.
- Most Millennials have a home computer and internet access, but not all.
- Remember, the Millennials are becoming a generation of "Haves" and "Have-Nots" as some parents can afford the technology - cell, cable TV, home computer, internet, video games - and some cannot.
- Most Millennials, as most of us know, have their own cell phone.

**VIDEO GAMING:** For Millennial boys, video-gaming is a pervasive culture. And female video gamers are growing in number. Hollywood movies, TV programming, rappers, fashionistas, and ad agencies are embracing the look, feel, and sensibility of this interactive entertainment world once considered only a geek subculture. The U. S. Army uses video-game style in its training and advertising. But there's an interesting backlash occurring: some Millennial women say they no longer date guys who "waste four hours a day gaming". Hmmmmmm.....

**GRANDPARENTS:** Use Boomer and Silent Generation grandparents, and their values, to reach the pre-teen and teenage Millennial Generation. For example, let Grandma and Grandpa set up a passbook savings account at the bank for their young grandchildren, and reward Grandma and Grandpa for doing so, with special offers. Grandparents are wealthy and want to be – and ARE – a meaningful presence in the lives of their Millennial grandchildren. They don't want to merely "buy gifts": they want to spend time, teach, bond with their grandchildren. And importantly, Millennial grandchildren want – and love – it, too. Millennials are very comfortable in the presence of older people because they're growing up constantly surrounded and supervised by older people.

**TRANSITION FROM X'ERS TO MILLENNIALS:** The youth marketplace is transitioning from X'ers to Millennials; that is, from:

- an attitude of exclusion to one of inclusion;
- "edgy" advertising to "optimistic" advertising;
- separation from parents and older generations to "It's cool to go shopping with Mom";
- "me" individualism to "We" collectivism. This is a team-oriented generation.

Mass fads and big brands are resurgent because of the instant and mass-communicative power of the internet. Mass merchants - especially the big-box discounters like Wal Mart and Target - are doing well with Millennials, especially during an uncertain economy.

**GENDER BENDERS:** This is a gender-bending generation. The males will pursue traditionally-female activities and careers and females will pursue traditionally-male activities.

**VIRAL MARKETING** – “buzz” marketing – is huge with the Millennials.

**FROM THE BOOK “MILLENNIALS RISING” BY STRAUSS AND HOWE:**

There are four major components to the change involving Millennial consumerism:

1. Parental influence over kid purchases is growing, according to 1996 Roper research.
  - A. Parents are concerned about product safety and shielding kids from nasty messages.
  - B. Even when shopping alone, Millennials have been given, and obey, a clear sense of where their mom and dad draw the line.
  - C. There is a proliferation of educational toys, educational camps, etc. instead of “just for play”.
2. Kid influence over parental purchases is growing.
  - A. For example: minivans, SUVs are now designed with kids in mind.
  - B. Houses are designed with more security, larger family areas.
  - C. Club Med, cruises, Las Vegas are now accommodating the kids.
  - D. Texas A&M Marketing professor James McNeal says Boomer kids began influencing parental purchase around the age of 12. Millennials are doing it at age 2!
3. Kid Marketing is towards a smaller number of bigger brands.
  - A. GenX was a fragmented and splintered generation of consumers, but not Millennials. However, because youth usually “rebels”, smart marketers can let Millennials think they’re individualistic, nonconformist, and rebellious, even though they’re not. As USA Today writes, “Kids fancy themselves free-thinking individuals... but the truth is teens are pretty much a huge wad of fashion conformists.”
  - B. Millennials – with the same teen magazines, same websites, chat-rooms, and TV shows - can now be reached EVERYWHERE by one big brand.
  - C. With this instant communication and coast-to-coast connectiveness, tastes tend to become standardized (exception: the poor, who don’t have the same access to the internet, cable TV, etc.).
  - D. Even in schools without uniforms, Millennials are dressing more uniformly, especially girls.
  - E. Therefore, once a marketer figures out what’s cool and what isn’t, it can instantly get to Millennials.
  - F. Because of this technology and the way Millennials use it, geography no longer matters. The days of New York and LA dictating taste are over.
4. Kids are re-defining the purpose of information technology.
  - A. For Boomers, technology meant information.
  - B. For Gen X, technology meant individualism.
  - C. For Millennials, technology means “a badge of generational membership”.
  - D. A higher percentage of teens say they can live without television than without their computers.
  - E. Parents monitor their kids’ e-commerce activities, so e-commerce has become a joint teen-parent activity.
5. Ad campaigns are changing for Millennials (remember the above-mentioned caveat: we’re in a dangerous transition from X’er youth to Millennial youth. Don’t find yourself “preparing for the last war”):
  - A. Bright colors are moving in, drab is moving out.
  - B. Ads present kids as smarter, doing good deeds, often in teams.
  - C. E.G., Gap ads: choreographed, wearing uniform clothing.
  - D. Athlete spokespersons who are nice people are in, Dennis Rodman is out.
  - E. Some marketers have successfully linked their messages to community service, which is a Millennial hot-button.
  - F. Conversely, Calvin Klein suffered a storm of protest and PR calamity in the ‘90s when it tried to erect a billboard at Times Square showing Millennial Tweens (age 8-12 or 9-12) in underwear.

G. Commerce in public schools is under scrutiny and significant criticism (Channel One; soft drink pouring licenses; etc.). Even students are rebelling against school commercialism.

**MULTI-GENERATIONAL MARKETING:** Millennials generally have a more positive view than X'ers of older people. They look up to them and welcome their wisdom. Multigenerational marketing and advertising can work well with this generation. Weave in the parents and grandparents, like DisneyWorld and Energizer Battery have done.

**ATTITUDES:**

- Millennials are very confident, even cocky. Don't talk down to them.
- Time is their rarest commodity. They'll pay for convenience and time-saving.
- They're logo-overloaded: they've grown up with "naming rights" to stadiums, concerts, bowl games. No-logo and even anti-logo strategies (such as American Apparel) might work.

**YOUNGER MILLENNIAL INCOME SOURCES:**

- Direct cash from parents for specific purchases is up.
- Money for doing household chores is up.
- Weekly "allowance" for no specific purpose is down.
- Income from paid employment is down. Parents increasingly want their kids to study math rather than wrap tacos.

**LOGOS:**

Millennials are growing up with logos and brands everywhere: stadium names; school soft drink licensing rights; apparel; websites; etc. But, Millennials might be breaking America's Logo Fever. Witness:

- More school uniforms and stricter dress codes.
- More protective parents who are aggressively shielding their children from commercialism.
- A parental backlash to the ill effects of Logo Fever. From the Wall Street Journal: "some parents are denying their wealth... deliberately living below their means... dishing out philosophical lectures before every purchase." WSJ labels it a "bratlash".

**FAITH AND RELIGION:** Consider Millennials' strong interest in spirituality. Enrollment in the nation's 104 "intentionally-Christ-Centered" colleges is up more than at traditional 4-year colleges. There is opportunity here.

**THEY ARE A GENERATION:** It's okay to couch your message in generational terms. Unlike GenX, Millennials feel like a generation, are developing generational pride, feel special, and if you celebrate them they'll "get it". Don't call them Gen Y!! Don't call them Echo Boomers! Call them "Millennials"!!!

Add your own future tips, tactics, and guidelines here
--

---

---

---

---